June 2006 Technical Series 06-114

Old North End, Saint John, New Brunswick Community Planning and Housing Charrette

Figure 1 Guides for the charrette tour of ONE

INTRODUCTION

The North End of Saint John was once a vibrant working town. With a healthy shipping industry to support it, the North End became home to many businesses. But with the decline of the shipping industry came the decline of the community. Today the community is struggling with issues of poverty, high unemployment, substandard housing, absentee landlords and a reputation throughout the rest of the city as a dangerous and desolate place.

The statistics paint a grim picture: 41 per cent of the population does not have a high school diploma; the rental rate is over 80 per cent; 42 per cent of households are led by a single parent; the incidence of low income is over 50 per cent; and over 60 per cent of households spend more than 30 per cent of their income on housing costs. But beyond the statistics there is a real community with many wonderful people that are trying to make it a better place. One thing statistical analysis does not reflect is the incredible group of local young people and community members that are so active and committed to their community. The ONE (Old North End) Change community group, formed in 2000, works to improve the quality of life in the North End.

Figure 2 Vacant Lots

This charrette arose out of discussions between the ONE Change group and CMHC regarding serious housing issues in the area. This led to a broader discussion about the community and the need for action. Through these discussions, it was decided that a five-day charrette would be the best way to move forward. The Cities and Environment Unit at Dalhousie University's Faculty of Architecture and Planning was then contacted and contracted to facilitate the charrette.

With a well-organized and committed community group the community was already well advanced in terms of being able to implement ideas for change. But how should they organize those ideas? What would be the vision they were all working towards? Having a community-based charrette would provide the opportunity for people to come together to decide on some of this collective vision. This collective vision and discussion about strengths, issues

and root causes of the issues would start to inform the types of housing that people wanted to promote for the community. Housing would remain at the forefront of the discussions but it would not be dealt with in isolation and would be seen in a broader community context. One thought was that housing project ideas would become the first step towards implementing the larger community goals and that those goals would begin to emerge over the course of the five-day charrette.

The charrette really became a community event and celebration attended by local, provincial and federal politicians, government agencies, residents, landlords, youth and business owners.

Figure 3 Shamrock Park

PREPARING FOR THE CHARRETTE

The background information collected by CMHC and the ONE Change Committee was provided by the City of Saint John and Statistics Canada. A recent study, completed by the Community Health Centre, also touched on many of the community issues and included a great deal of research about the North End. This information was collected and displayed in poster format at the charrette and in booklet format intended as reference for the working groups.

Great effort was put into contacting landlords, community members, local business owners and other stakeholders to attend the event to ensure adequate and diverse representation from the community. It was acknowledged that people would be unable to attend all sessions at the charrette, so target groups were contacted and invited for specific sessions and discussions. For instance, planning, design and housing professionals were contacted and asked to participate in Day 4 (Housing Action Day). Their expertise was helpful in sketching out ideas that people had about housing and finding out about possible funding sources.

Meals were provided (lunch and supper) and prepared by members of the Main Street Baptist Church. Having food meant that many people stayed at the community centre instead of leaving to go home to eat. Having meals provided also meant that people from the community who did not plan to attend the charrette could come to the centre for the food and at least find out about what was happening. It also brought in a lot of the kids.

INVOLVEMENT OF YOUTH

Aimee Hooper of the North End Community Centre worked with local youth to make sure they had input leading up to the event. Elementary school students were asked to draw posters about what they would do if they were mayor for a day. The posters were then displayed in the Centre for the duration of the charrette. Middle school kids were given cameras to go out into the community to take pictures of the things they like about their community and the things that they saw as issues. They presented their pictures on Day 1 of the charrette (to lead into the discussion on strengths and issues). The ONE Change youth group was involved in many of the breakout sessions during the charrette as well. After school, kids dropped in to see what was happening in the centre and participated in the discussions. Many of their ideas are included in the community document that was produced after the charrette.

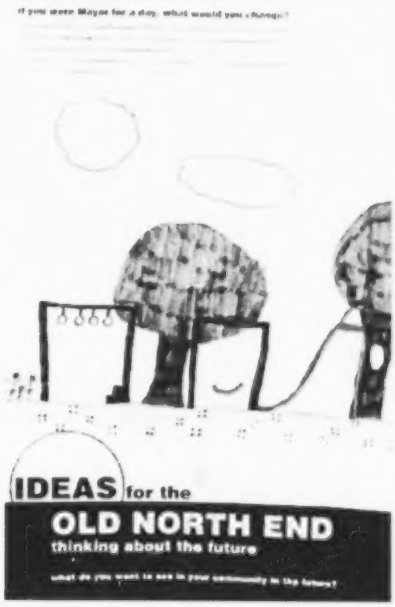

Figure 4 Poster "If I were Mayor for a day"

PLANNING PROCESS AND CHARRETTE OBJECTIVES

The charrette planning process was based on the First Nation Community Planning Model (Second Edition) published by the Cities and Environment Unit in 2003. This Model outlines the seven-stage process for developing a community-based plan:

1. Gathering Background Information
2. Identifying Strengths and Issues
3. Researching Root Causes
4. Establishing a Community Vision
5. Building a Framework
6. Developing an implementation strategy
7. Monitoring the plan and projects

Though the intention of the charrette in Saint John was not to create a complete community plan, it was decided that the format of the charrette would be a modification of these seven stages and would provide the foundation for future community action in the North End. Because the Background Information had already been collected, it was decided that the stages of the planning process to be covered in this charrette were stages 2, 3, 4, and 5 organized as follows:

Day 1: Review of Background Information, Identifying Strengths and Issues and Root Causes

Day 2: Establishing a Community Vision, Identifying Community Values

Day 3: Building a Framework (including project lists, action areas and new community structure)

Day 4: Housing design and policies

Day 5: Wrap-up and next steps

The basic format of the charrette struck a balance between presentations and small group work, with an opportunity for groups to present and discuss their findings as a large group. Small groups on average comprised about eight people and typically there were between four to five groups; when the groups reconvened as a large group there were about 40 people. Each small group session lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and the larger group discussions about the same.

Each group wrote their ideas on flip chart paper and when finished, taped them up on the walls of the main charrette room. When the groups came back together, each group was able to present their ideas to the larger group. All ideas were consolidated at the end of each exercise, looking for common themes and connections between ideas. Once this was consolidated, it was presented back to the larger group to make sure it captured the ideas and spirit of the discussion. Then everything was again taped on the wall for people to make comments and give feedback.

Each evening the community centre was open for residents, business owners and any other interested parties to come in and see the work that had been accomplished. Turnout to these open houses was low but it did provide an opportunity for some feedback. The hope was that the open houses would ensure a transparent process and be used as a time to refine some of the work that had been accomplished that day. If someone was not able to make it during the day, they could stop by in the evening to add their comments and provide a fresh outlook.

The objectives of the week were to get community members together to discuss issues, and think of ways these issues could be addressed in a coordinated manner. The charrette was intended to take this discussion further and help organize community ideas and goals, establish a common vision and make some decisions about the approach to housing in particular. All of this would be articulated through discussion, group work and mapping. The outcomes of the charrette would be product based and would include:

1. A list of community strengths and issues (Day 1)
2. A list of root causes of the issues (Day 1)
3. A physical issues map (Day 1)
4. A community vision statement (Day 2)
5. A list of community values (Day 2)
6. A list of project ideas (Day 3)
7. Action areas to help organize the projects (Day 3)
8. A community structure map (Day 3)
9. Ideas towards housing design and policies (Day 4)
10. Ideas about next steps and how to move forward (Day 5)

Breaking the work of the week into clear and manageable products provided structure and allowed people to see how each step of the process (and each product) built on previous steps. In addition to the background information posters on the wall, there were five colour-coded (one colour for each day) blank posters corresponding to each of the five days. At the end of each day, the completed products were taped onto the poster for that day. This meant that the posters got more and more full as the week went on. These posters were left up on the wall for any comments or questions from participants.

PLANNING ATTITUDE

The charrette represented an opportunity to foster a certain attitude about planning and community action. There was a sense of urgency about doing the work, refining it and reviewing it all in one day that added to the intensity of the week. In the evenings after the charrette had wrapped for the day, planners from the CEU continued to review and refine the work and prepare a presentation for the next day highlighting the events and products of the previous day. This lead into an introduction to the products the group would be working on for that day. There were various elements incorporated into the charrette that fostered this attitude to make it a successful community-based event and contributed to its success:

- Tammy Calvin, a community member and member of the ONE Change Committee was the Master of Ceremonies for the whole week.
- Community members introduced the morning presentations helped summarize charrette events and products.
- Youth were included in all activities and discussions and one high school student opened the closing ceremonies and welcomed everyone to the centre.
- The process was completely open and everyone was welcome to come and participate or simply observe.
- Open houses were held every night for those that could not attend during the day.
- Food was served to attract people to the event and encourage them to stay.
- Facilitators maintained the holistic view that community development is not simply about one issue or one project but that many of these things are connected.
- While the process is incredibly important, end products need to be created and refined to capture the discussions and ideas.
- Brainstorming ideas in small groups, presenting the ideas to the larger group and consolidating the ideas right away for review and discussion contributed to the active and productive atmosphere.
- The information was presented in a clear and visible manner which made the event and discussions accessible for all participants.
- The venue was also open and accessible and included kitchen and classroom facilities.
- The week started with a celebratory day with a large community meal, entertainment and welcome addresses from politicians and community leaders.
- The week culminated in closing ceremonies that included dignitaries announcing support for the community. This translated into a lot of enthusiasm and excitement and ended the charrette on a high note.

DAY 1 PRODUCT REVIEW

List of Community Strengths, Issues and Root Causes and Physical Issues Map

Identifying community strengths and issues is a necessary step in the community planning process. Doing this enables a community to identify weaknesses or areas that need to be addressed and also see what assets they have and decide what can be built on. The mayor for a day posters and slide show presentation by the youth provided the group with a sound understanding of the underlying issues in the community. Community members added to the list through a series of discussions and group exercises. Many people were surprised at just how many strengths there were. Afterwards, the group analyzed each of the issues, individually and together to try and make connections between them. They discussed how these issues came to be and created a list of root causes.

Community Strengths

- People
- Development Potential
- Good Schools
- North End Community Centre (NECC)
- Community Leadership

Community Issues

- Garbage
- Housing
- Poverty
- Nothing to do
- Drug use
- Crime and Safety
- Lack of political responsibility

Figure 5 Much of the housing in the North End is neglected. However, you can still see evidence of its beauty and character.

Root Causes (of community issues)

- Neglect and lack of investment
- Lack of housing options
- Lack of services
- No hope/Lack of self-esteem
- Historic reasons
- The cycle of poverty

Physical Issues Map

A physical issues map shows problem areas associated with the built or natural environments. The purpose of this map is to show how the issues in the community are connected to the health of the built and natural environments and for people to see how their quality of life is directly related to their surroundings. This map is a compilation of the work completed on Day 1 of the charrette. Youth were also very involved in the creation of this map, and even created their own maps highlighting streets that they felt were safe and unsafe.

DAY 2 PRODUCT REVIEW

Community Vision Statement

Establishing a vision for a community provides a direction for future action. The vision enables the community to find a common focus so that everyone is working to realize the same goals. Vision statements work best when they are clear and simple and easy to remember. It is not possible for a vision statement to include all of the community's goals and in fact, if it does, it can often become a generic watered down vision that tries to cover everything but actually does nothing. The real challenge for a community is finding a vision that really encompasses what they want to work towards. There were all sorts of discussions at the charrette about what the focus should be. Many of these ideas were captured in the community value statements. These statements encompass what the community holds to be uncompromisable truths and should be reflected in daily community life and all future projects. Having the statements also means that nothing is lost in the vision, but that it works in conjunction with these values and philosophies.

Community Value Statements

1. Safety first
2. Youth lead in all projects
3. Accessibility ensured for all services and programs
4. Pride in our community, in our work and in ourselves

5. Respect and dignity for everyone
6. Local skills and talents must be used first
7. Inclusion of all people regardless of race, age, income, education level, employment status, religious affiliation or gender
8. Build partnerships and connections in all our projects

Community Vision Statement

The impetus for this vision statement came out of discussions about the importance of pride and ownership of the community. Community members felt that if things were going to get better in their community they were going to have to do it. Many of the discussions centered on the idea of celebration, through events, festivities and valuing the people that live in the community. There was also a feeling that residents would like their community to become self-sufficient, so while they would foster partnerships and connections with people and groups outside the community, residents would have almost all they needed right there in the North End.

Together we will care for and celebrate, our Old North End forever.

DAY 3 PRODUCT REVIEW

Project Lists, Action Areas and Community Structure Map

On Day 3 there was a great buzz in the air as people started to brainstorm project ideas. By the end of the day there were almost 300 of them! Included are a few highlighted projects.

As the project lists were created, themes started to emerge. These themes became the basis for Action Areas. Action Areas describe areas of focus in starting to realize the vision. They include various initiatives and outline projects that help address issues in the community. Because the list of projects was so long, each action area is subdivided to help provide more organization.

Also created was a community structure map. A structure map is the foundation of future development. It shows the essential physical components of the community and how they should be organized. It indicates basic infrastructure such as roads, facilities and houses, and also highlights essential community structure pieces such as the community core, playgrounds, parks and gardens, trails and important streets, and the connections between all of these. This map is a compilation of all the group work and discussion about the essential pieces of the community.

Figure 6 Community structure plan

Action Area 1: Housing

Providing shelter

- Homeless shelter
- Youth shelter

Encouraging ownership

- Participatory design for new housing
- Land banking while property prices are low (work with City)

Facilitating renovation and rehabilitation

- Renovators resource centre (for recyclable materials to fix homes)
- Encourage ownership and care for heritage homes (need registry for heritage homes)
- "Wind of Change" program to fix drafty windows

Training

- Sweat equity program (people work for their homes and help build them)
- Train and employ community members to renovate and build homes
- Partner with community college and Carpenters Centre for training

Innovative and sustainable housing design and support services

- Flex™ housing

- Supportive housing
- Transitional housing
- Incorporating neighbourhood safety into housing design (all houses must have windows and porches on street to provide "eyes on the street")
- New housing could have revenue generating office or commercial space incorporated into design to rent out or provide space for home offices

Organization
- Tenants association
- Landlords association
- Neighbourhood Watch and Block Parents
- Meet with University of New Brunswick Saint John Campus (UNBSJ) and realtors to improve image of Old North End (North End could become site of new university housing)

Action Area 2: Community Pride and Beautification

Protecting the environment
- Education programs on recycling and composting
- Bottle depot or travelling redemption centre

Making the community beautiful and safe
- Community clean-up days
- Initiate program to exchange garbage for bus tickets
- Adopt-a-street beautification and tree planting
- Establish community gardens

Promoting a positive image of the Old North End
- Community pride billboards
- Marketing campaign for Old North End and ONE Change Committee

Celebrating, gathering and community events
- Community meals at Community Centre and Fire Hall
- Establish coffee shop at Fire Hall
- Community events calendar and public bulletin boards

Reconnecting with heritage and with the rest of the City
- Heritage plaques, murals and photos throughout the community
- Connect to Harbour Passage Trail
- Recognize and celebrate Indian Town

Action Area 3: Celebrating Youth

Planning events and activities for recreation
- North End Days
- Winter Carnival
- Dance classes at Community Centre
- Boxing Club

Developing leadership and confidence
- Job shadowing program for kids
- Apprenticeship program to do home renovations
- Youth volunteer program (youth work in the community and with seniors and log volunteer hours to go towards receiving prizes and awards)
- Promote the Order of the Maple Leaf or Duke of Edinburgh award programs

Building community infrastructure
- Skate park
- Swimming pool
- Fix and expand facilities at Shamrock Park and Victoria Park
- Basketball Court
- Ice-cream parlour
- Outdoor stage and amphitheatre

Action Area 4: Training and Skill Development

Educating all community members
- Provide GED programs at Community Centre
- Trade skill training offered at Community Centre
- Adult mentorship and tutoring (peer to peer) for literacy and job skills
- Mobile school
- Art and sewing classes for all ages

Providing programs and services
- Provide daycares and better childcare options (childcare co-op for women working part-time to share child care with other women, or families)
- Employment skill workshops (resumé writing, what to wear, how to prepare for an interview)
- Library and CAP site
- Volunteer and skill database

- "Dress for Success" program

Developing partnerships within and outside the community
- Partner with Carpenters Training Centre to do home renovations
- Train and certify people to be coaches of athletic teams

Promoting and supporting small businesses
- Small engine repair workshop at Power Boat Centre
- Craft and Farmers market
- Promote entrepreneurs through entrepreneurial start-up fund

Enhancing mobility of community members
- Provide transportation to community college
- Workshop on how to use transit system (routes and schedules)
- Carpooling program
- Work with City to improve transit system and access for North End

Action Area 5: Health

Helping people obtain proper nutrition
- Provide cooking and nutrition classes
- Meal programs at Community Centre
- Community kitchen and food co-op (buy in bulk to save money)
- Restructure the food bank

Preventing health issues through education and support
- After hours clinic in plaza with workshops and programs
- Sexual health clinic with workshops and programs
- Teen clinic with workshops and programs
- Mobile clinic

Promoting healthy lifestyles and choices
- "Baby think it over" program to prevent teen pregnancy
- Fitness studio or workout gym

DAY 4 PRODUCT REVIEW

Ideas Towards Housing Design and Policy

In addition to specific initiatives, housing principles were established. These were principles that people agreed were vital when considering building new housing, or renovating existing housing in the community.

1. Housing must be affordable.
2. The community should promote households of mixed incomes living together.
3. There should be options for all family types (seniors, single mothers, young families, single people with no children).
4. Housing should include some communal facilities (laundry, kitchen, play spaces, party room).
5. Housing must be built or renovated using local skills and materials.
6. Housing must be beautiful.
7. There should be support for relatives to be able to buy a house together (a house with more than one unit so extended families can live together and share financial commitment).
8. Housing design should provide for people to be able to have their "eyes on the street" (through porches, large front windows, entrances at street level).
9. People should be included in the design of their own homes.

Short-term Housing Action (0-6 months)

The Winds of Change

This project is an immediate short-term solution for drafty windows, to try and alleviate some of the financial and health burdens on community residents. The basis of the idea is that youth in the community get paired up with someone in the building community to act as a mentor and provide training. The youth, along with their mentors, go house to house to fix the windows and in the process show residents how to care for and seal them. A potential partnership with the Fire Department could also be possible and the door-to-door visits could also be used to check smoke detectors.

Eight steps were identified:

1. Market "Winds of Change" program by contacting the media, politicians, schools and businesses
2. Get supplies for window kits (contact businesses for sponsorships and government agencies for support)
3. The ONE Change Committee works with homeowners and landlords to do housing assessments throughout the community to decide which houses need the most help.
4. ONE Change organizes 20 youth (ages 16-20).

5. Youth paired with people from the building industry who will help provide training
6. Youth and mentor go door-to-door to fix windows (and show residents how to fix/maintain/clean them).
7. Marketing material such as a poster is posted on the windows or front door to say, "ONE Change was here".
8. Literature and information on government programs, fire prevention, recycling etc. is left behind in each house.

This project is a short-term solution but provides many benefits:

- At least 10 per cent energy savings (which means 10 per cent more disposable income for food or other household expenses).
- Two tonnes less of greenhouse gas omissions per household per year
- Twenty youth trained
- Mentors contacted and partnerships formed with the building industry, fire department
- Health benefits
- Build better relationships with landlords (landlords also receive information about government programs)
- ONE Change gets publicity
- The image of the North End improves
- Contact made with local businesses

Medium-term Housing Action (6 months – 2 years)

Medium term solutions were divided into building new housing and renovating existing housing. New housing included:

- A new housing 15-unit co-op at the corner of Adelaide and Victoria Streets.
- The building would include support services such as a daycare.
- Bottom floors could be turned into business or offices that could be rented which would help pay for the building.
- All of the housing principles outlined would be incorporated.

Housing renovation included:

- Look to the Provincial and Federal Governments for support and existing funding programs
- Compile an inventory of housing conditions
- Find out who owns what land and making contact (start building relationships with existing landowners)
- Renovate 2 units as pilot projects
- Convert 1 existing building into housing co-op

Long-term Housing Action (2 years +)

The long-term goals for the community were:

- At least 50 per cent home ownership in the next 10 years
- Establish "rent to own" housing units
- Landbank (work with City to purchase vacant land or older homes at a good price now for development in the future)
- Partner with community college for renovations (houses in North End become pilots for hands on training for college students)
- Designate heritage properties and districts

DAY 5 PRODUCT REVIEW

Promises Made

On the last day of the charrette the community presented the week's work to a crowd of about 100 people. The day was opened by a local youth and attended by a number of dignitaries including MP Paul Zed, MLA Trevor Holder, Mayor Norm McFarlane and Councilor Peter McGuire. Community members Rob Pierce and Joan McInnis also said a few words, and Rob Pierce presented the group's ideas for the "Winds of Change". A number of promises were also made to the community including:

- Paul Zed and Elizabeth Weir will work with CMHC to support the "Winds of Change" Program.
- Mayor Norm McFarlane pledged $1,000.00 to the community.
- Aliant donated $1,000.00 in partnership with UNBSJ for a bursary program for youth from the North End to attend the university.
- Seth Asimakos from the Community Loan Fund promised to work with the community to implement "Money Matters" Training for residents.
- Rob Pierce and Tammy Calvin committed to leading the "Winds of Change" project.

Next Steps

There is obviously a lot of momentum building in the North End, and by the sounds of it, the community has a lot of support from community members and partners in all levels of government. It is important to act immediately and start to turn this momentum into real action.

Some immediate steps are:

1. complete an official community plan that deals with infrastructure, service location, open space, social programs, land use and housing. The plan can build on the initiatives in this document;
2. initiate organizations and structure to deal with project implementation and action. Community institutions will need to be established (to build on existing community groups and create new ones). Decide on roles and responsibilities;
3. contact government agencies (municipal, provincial and federal) for funding and support. Make sure the links to the City are strong and sustainable;
4. take immediate action on one or two projects.

CONCLUSION

The Old North End Charrette showed the level of enthusiasm and commitment that the community has with regards to improving the quality of life in their neighbourhood. A document has been produced that can be used as the basis of a community plan to help secure funding and prioritize efforts.

The last day of the charrette, with so many government representatives present, also showed the connections that the community has with the rest of the City. There are a lot of people who want to help the community and their enthusiasm showed that. It is now time to turn these great ideas into action.

CMHC Project Manager: Sandra Marshall

Consultant: Cities and Environment Unit Dalhousie University

Housing Research at CMHC

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or contact:

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
700 Montreal Road
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0P7

Phone: 1 800 668-2642
Fax: 1 800 245-9274

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